

## THE CREMATION SOCIETY OF ENGLAND.

THE annual meeting of subscribers to the Cremation Society of England was held on March 17th at the society's offices, 324, Regent Street, Sir CHARLES CAMERON being in the chair.

### Report of Council.

The report of the council was presented. It stated that amongst those cremated at Woking and Golder's Green during 1909 were Mr. George Meredith, Mr. Frith, R.A., the Ven. Archdeacon H. W. Tribe, Canon Cooper, Mrs. Wilberforce, St. John Hankin, Sir G. William Des Voeux, G.C.M.G., Richard Bowdler Sharpe, Mr. Thomas Wakley, editor of the *Lancet*, and Mr. Felix Cobbold, M.P. for Ipswich.

### Chairman's Address.

Sir CHARLES CAMERON, in his address, said that when one looked at the statistics of cremation in other countries the progress in Great Britain was more or less disappointing. In Germany, for example, the annual figures were four or five times as great as ours. In Paris, since the erection of the furnace at Père Lachaise, over 94,000 bodies had been incinerated within twenty years. This arose chiefly from the fact that administrative authorities in the French capital, instead of, as was done in this country, consigning the bodies with which they had to deal to the squalid indignity of a pauper's grave, submitted them to swift, decorous, and economical disintegration by means of the crematory furnace. In this country cremation had been confined to the wealthier and more intellectual classes. As to the question of cremation as a substitute for pauper burial, this society had hitherto deliberately refrained from advocating it: in the first place, because it might jar upon the feelings of a class unfamiliar with the practice, and, in the second, because the association of cremation with pauperism would, it was feared, have a tendency to prejudice against it the well-to-do classes, among which its supporters were to be found. It seemed to him a question, however, whether the practice would not very soon in this country have reached a stage where it could stand on its own merits, if it had not already done so, and whether the society might not now, without any ill effect on the progress of the movement, call the attention of local authorities to the advantages, on sentimental as well as on economic and sanitary grounds, of the practice which has already stood the test of twenty years in Paris. As to the advantages on sentimental grounds, any one who has noted the horror occasioned by disclosures as to the system of "pit" burial whenever some accident has brought it under public notice will require no argument to drive home the superiority of cremation. In point of economy cremation on a scale on which the apparatus could be kept continuously employed would be cheaper than the meanest interment, while, as to the sanitary advantages of the one practice over the other, he thought he might say without hesitation that among authorities on public health there was practically perfect unanimity on the point. In a most interesting and exhaustive paper on the progress of cremation, in the *BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL* of March 5th, he found a quotation from a recently published collection of papers by Lord Lister, which exhibited the dangers of the present system in a clear and practical form. Revelations made during the past year showed that the practice of "pit burial" still existed in different parts of the kingdom. Sir Charles Cameron himself had seen one of those noisome pits, and he remembered a case, regarding which evidence was given before a Select Committee on the Certification of Death, presided over by one of their Vice-Presidents, Sir Walter Foster. The case was that of a woman charged with poisoning her second husband. In the course of their investigations the police discovered that her first husband had also died under suspicious circumstances, and authority was obtained for the exhumation of his body. But he had been buried in a common pit somewhere in the north of England, and when a search was made it was found impossible to identify the coffin containing his body, and, so far as that point was concerned, the case fell through.

The gravest objection which its opponents were wont to urge against cremation was that while in case of death through crime or violence a buried body could be exhumed and examined, all possibility of subsequent examination was destroyed by incineration. Now the society always contended that the point at which the State should take precautions for the detection of fatalities resulting from crime was before a permit is granted for the disposal of the body. That was what had been aimed at in its rules from the very first, and that was what had been insured by the recent legislation regulating the practice of cremation in this country—legislation entailing the most stringent certification, and, in any case of doubt, the evidence of an autopsy, as the indispensable preliminary for permission to cremate. Their burial laws were, on the contrary, of the crudest description, and the certification which they provided for was little better than a farce; and as to the evidence afforded by subsequent exhumation, it was notorious that all trace of many of the most subtle and deadly poisons was rapidly destroyed by the progress of decomposition. The Cremation Society of England was not a trading association. Its object was to educate the public into the adoption of reform in the method of the disposal of the dead, which with each year's increase in the density of the population became more urgently needed. The reason for the erection of the crematory at Woking was to start the movement. For years the Woking establishment alone kept the movement alive, but at length it spread notably—within the last decade—until now they could point to thirteen different crematories within Great Britain; and the comparatively short experience of one of them proved that in London, at any rate, cremation as a business undertaking could be carried on with a good prospect of commercial success. The object of the society was not commercial but educational, although, having the Woking crematorium on their hands and being able to work it at a small profit, they saw no reason for discontinuing it. It was not surprising that a feeling had been manifested among certain members of the council that the time had come when they should endeavour to free themselves from the taint of commercialism and the attention involved in its management and endeavour to negotiate for its transfer to some purely commercial cremation company. If this could be effected, all the energies of the society could be devoted to propagandist work, which at present occupied a large portion of the time of its officials, and which had from the beginning constituted the *raison d'être* of the Cremation Society of England.

### Election of Vice-Presidents.

The report and balance-sheet were adopted, and the election of Lord Ronald Sutherland-Gower, Sir L. Alma-Tadema, and Mr. W. Robinson as vice-presidents was confirmed. The retiring members of the council, Mr. F. H. Skrine and the Rev. Charles Voysey, were reappointed.

## SECRET REMEDIES AND PROPRIETARY PREPARATIONS.

In recent contributions on the composition of certain secret remedies and specialties, Dr. F. Zernik<sup>1</sup> gives the results of his investigation of nine preparations.

*Dealin Powder*, a Berlin preparation, is described as an antiseptic medicament for wounds containing "a highly active oxygen combined with a dry fatty substance." On examination no dry fatty substance was found, and the "highly active oxygen" was represented by sodium perborate. The chief constituents of this preparation were: 20 parts of sodium perborate, 10 parts of boric acid, 10 parts of zinc oxide, and 60 parts of a mixture of talc with traces of starch and magnesium carbonate.

*Hochfelder Pitch Plaster* is advertised by the manufacturers as a porous plaster prepared with gum elastic, and as the best external medicament for the treatment of painful affections which follow cold, blows, over-exertion or other disturbances of the nervous or muscular activity. The examination showed that the preparation did not contain any pitch at all, and that its composition was similar to that of "*Colleplastrum capsicum*," a plaster, which according to an Imperial Order dated November 22nd, 1901, must not be offered for sale in drug shops. As pitch plaster is not included in this Order, the manufacturers considered that they would be safe in applying this description to the plaster.

<sup>1</sup> *Deut. med. Woch.*, Nos. 38 and 47, 1909.